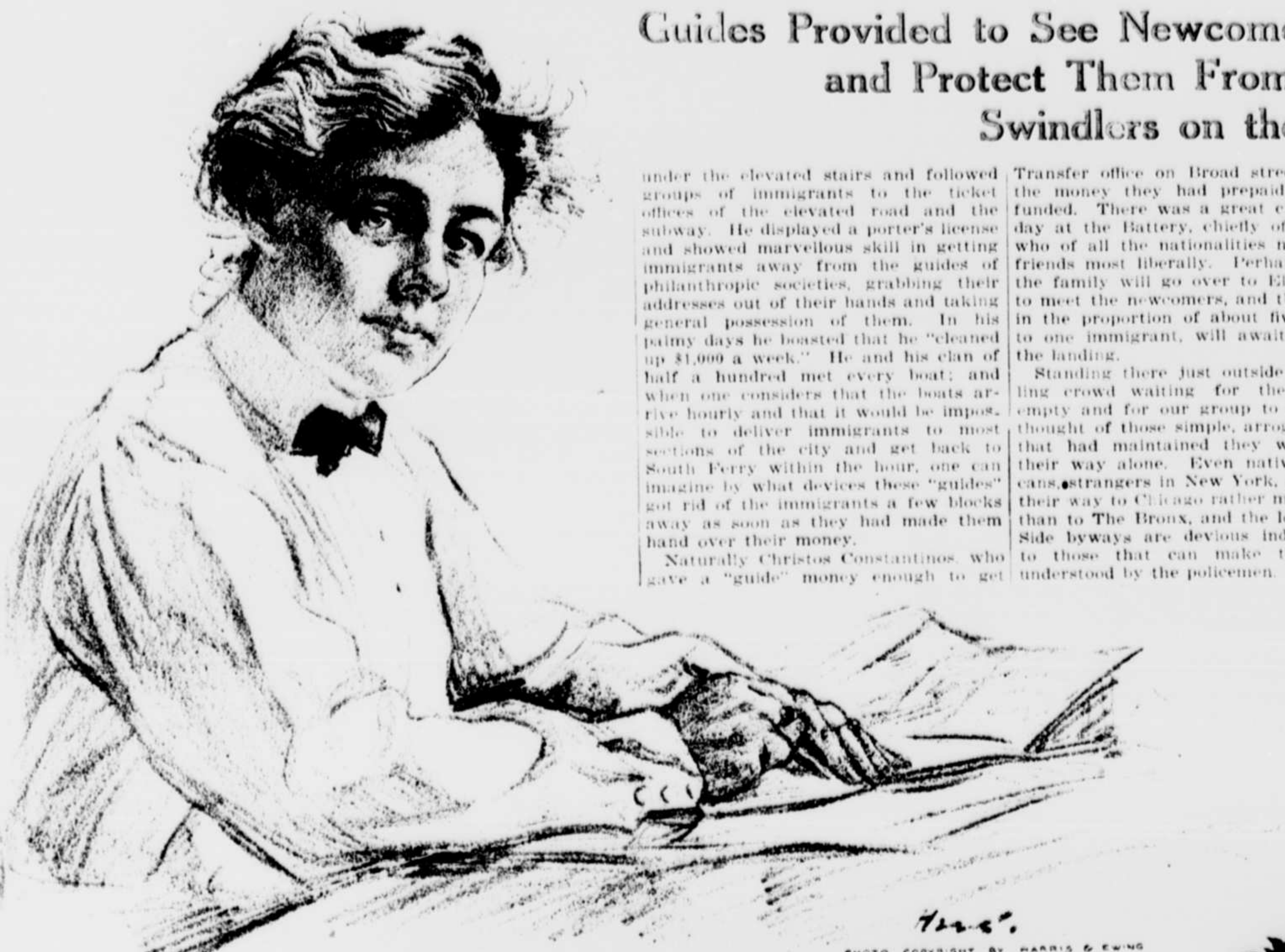
NEW YORK'S DOOR MADE SAFE FOR THE IMMIGRANT

Guides Provided to See Newcomers to Their Destination and Protect Them From the Wiles of Swindlers on the Way



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Frances A. Kellor, managing director of the North American Civic League for Immigrants.

"TO NEW YORK" says a swinging door in the more subterranean regions of the great Ellis Island building. The laconic label conveys as little of the hopes and tragedies it ends as of the hopes and tragedies it begins. It is guarded by a youth in blue uniform, who developing a slight interest in me for I had been standing off at one side of the door for several hours, nonchalantly explained. "This here is the most important job on the island—they only get past me if they've had their slips marked O. K. for New York upstairs." Here he deftly extracted O. K. slips from the hands of three bewildered Poles who had reached him. Uncertain as to what was wanted, and too overloaded with bundles to hand over anything, they had simply waited for him to take any action that was to be taken. He gave them a friendly shove toward the door and by a vigorous pantomime tried to instruct the third to conceal in an inside pocket the money which he had been showing at the desk upstairs and which he still held unrolled in his hand. But the Pole had already shoved his bundle through the door; and realizing that this long corridor leading to the dock was the homestretch of his long adventure, he was now moving on too quickly to profit by advice or new ideas.

This door into the New York world is at the bottom of a long staircase down which may come only those immigrants discharged for New York city. Not even all those that are bound for New York city pass unchallenged through the swinging door. Those that are waiting for friends or relatives go down the stairs, it is true, but their section of the stairs leads to a detention room, not to the swinging door. From where I stood I could see into the detention room, for a small part of the dividing wall is made of iron screening. It was full of women and children, some of them lunching happily, others rising on the benches in nervous hope or fear at every new sight or sound or crowding around the negro porter who came in at intervals to cry out the names of those whose friends had arrived. Now and then a little dark eyed rascal, probably now the calmest member of his family, cautiously opened the door and pretended to estimate his chance of dashing across the corridor, with the sole purpose of provoking a rush from the fat, good natured porter or from the young man that guarded the door.

Those that pass at once through the swinging door have been judged competent to look out for themselves in America. Some of them are going to friends, at whose instance, perhaps, they have come, and whom they may meet at the Battery. But it is not necessarily evidence of neglect not to meet an arriving friend when to do so would mean a whole day away from the factory or the shop or the pushcart! It is hard to tell exactly when ships will dock and harder still to tell how many ships will dock at once, and therefore how swiftly or slowly the line will pass through Ellis Island.

But a good many of those that pass through the door "To New York" are not going to friends at all, in spite of the fact that before they came down the stairs they handed up to the man at the examiner's desk their "friend's" address and those of us that watched them from the visitors' gallery got a sentimental satisfaction from reflecting that these eager, bewildered fellows had already some point of contact with the strange new country, some vessel to tie to until they themselves learned to navigate the stream of American life. Many of those addresses were bought or borrowed for the occasion; others were the addresses, not of friends, but of acquaintances of the remotest sort who will feel little concern in the arrival of the man that offers their address as his destination.

As the afternoon wore on and a delayed line began to move more quickly down the stairs—there were several ships in that day bringing mixed crowds of Italians, Greeks, Hungarians and Russians—I followed the line through the swinging door, down to the barren, cellarlike corridor, past the crowded quarters of the waiting friends in the outbuilding adjoining the dock. The uneven line scuttled along resoundingly on the wooden floor until at the dock end it was halted in front of a high desk. From the other side of it I watched the proceedings. An officer of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society selected the Jews as they passed to be delivered by this society free of charge to their destination in the city. He pinned badges on them so that they could later be mustered by the society's guides.

Family of immigrants awaiting the guide who will see them to their new home.

The desk belongs to the Immigrant Guide and Transfer, established to deliver immigrants that need and desire guidance to any part of Greater New York for sums ranging from 25 cents to $1. For some time I watched the capable, kindly and vigilant young agent at his desk as he accosted each immigrant as he passed, asking him where he was going in New York, whether he could get there by himself or whether he wished guidance. Once in a while a gay crowd that had been met by friends swept hilariously past the desk without pausing, and on through the door to the dock. Sometimes an immigrant met the agent's questions with the proud assertion that he lived in America and was merely returning from a visit! He was swept on by the agent with a cheerful wave of the hand. The Russian behind him who maintained that though he had never been in America before, knew no English and had no friends, he needed no guidance and would not be tagged by the Immigrant Guide and Transfer, was also, after a swift colloquy, waved on to look out for himself—but not so cheerfully. For the agent knew his type well, and knew that over at the Barge Office where the ferry came in, on the street cars and in the streets throughout the city, there would be porters and runners, cabmen and various adventurers, who intuitively recognize a typical victim when they see him, and would have no difficulty in extracting $10 for a subway ticket or $15 for a cab ride to Hoboken.

The investigation that preceded the organization of the Immigrant Guide and Transfer in 1909 disclosed the presence of fifty or sixty licensed and unlicensed porters, runners and cabmen at the Barge Office. There was almost no check upon their operations. True, their licenses were revocable if they were convicted of abuses, but the several licenses for porters, runners and cabmen were issued by several different powers, and if a man lost one sort of license he could promptly apply for another. Moreover there was no system for identifying license holders, so that there was no practicable way of distinguishing between a licensed man and one that had merely rented an official cap for $2 and bought an official badge for 50 cents. Men licensed only to carry baggage offered guide service and men that had never owned hacks pursued their various ways of dividing the immigrant from his money under a hackman's license. It has been estimated that more people have been robbed in one day in the little space between the Barge Office gate and the South Ferry subway or elevated than in any other place of a similar size in the United States.

In the heyday of the activities of unscrupulous porters and runners a stout little man about 22 years old with dark curly hair and dark eyes took up his permanent camp near the fruit stand under the elevated stairs and followed groups of immigrants to the ticket offices of the elevated road and the subway. He displayed a porter's license and showed marvellous skill in getting immigrants away from the guides of philanthropic societies, grabbing their addresses out of their hands and taking general possession of them. In his palmy days he boasted that he "cleaned up $1,000 a week." He and his clan of half a hundred met every boat; and when one considers that the boats arrive hourly and that it would be impossible to deliver immigrants to most sections of the city and get back to South Ferry within the hour, one can imagine by what devices these "guides" got rid of the immigrants a few blocks away as soon as they had made them hand over their money.

Naturally Christos Constantinos, who gave a "guide" money enough to get him a ticket to Chicago and was put on the subway and told to stay there until he got to Chicago "to-morrow night," showed himself stupid and dazed when the subway guard insisted that Christos must get off at Dyckman street. And Ivan Burif, who handed over his $25 for an official cap sold him by a runner who declared his father was "boss of the American Government" and that the cap represented a life job for Ivan, was in a high state of excitement when he found himself not only without the job but also without his entire capital in America. Another runner, after giving a Greek immigrant a counterfeit $20 bill for $15 in English money, piloted him around corners till he was confused, and then slipped away from him. Many were the troubles of those that went alone.

An effort was made to deal with these abuses by securing an arrest here and there, wherever possible, and by securing greater police protection. All this proved to be only a slow and desultory way of attempting to meet the situation. There seemed to be nothing to do but to compete with the exploiters. The Immigrant Guide and Transfer was therefore organized as an experiment and as a philanthropy. Its success in keeping down abuses and in serving the immigrant later warranted turning the experiment into a business. Its fees are designed to cover the cost of service, not to insure profit. But except for the payment of a small initial investment the enterprise is now self-sustaining.

On a busy day the Immigrant Guide and Transfer agent may arrange to deliver several hundred immigrants. These are tagged at the desk with a yellow ticket pinned under the lapel so that they can be identified by the Immigrant Guide and Transfer guides. Immigrants have been known to object to this public tagging, and to meet this sufficiently human objection a rather less obtrusive button is supplied to the sensitive.

I saw that many in the line accepted the guide service with very evident relief, others phlegmatically as if enduring one more formality. These last, perhaps, needed the service not least. Often I marvelled at the patient, able agent, at his careful questions and explanations, at his ready shifting from one language or dialect to another, or at his genius in deciphering some of the addresses that were spread before him. Sometimes they were written, sometimes printed, one-half in Lithuanian, perhaps, and the other half in a Lithuanianized English. I noticed that one man who could not himself read the address he carried maintained most loudly that he needed no assistance.

On every boat that leaves Ellis Island for New York are groups of those to be delivered, accompanied by the Immigrant Guide and Transfer guides. I went over on the boat at 3:30 with groups aggregating about a hundred. At the pier several of these were after all met by their friends, and they were taken only to the Immigrant Guide and Transfer office on Broad street, where the money they had prepaid was refunded. There was a great crowd this day at the Battery, chiefly of Italians, who of all the nationalities meet their friends most liberally. Perhaps one of the family will go over to Ellis Island to meet the newcomers, and the others, in the proportion of about five friends to one immigrant, will await them at the landing.

Standing there just outside the jostling crowd waiting for the boat to empty and for our group to get off, I thought of those simple, arrogant souls that had maintained they would find their way alone. Even native Americans, strangers in New York, could find their way to Chicago rather more easily than to The Bronx, and the lower East Side byways are devious indeed, even to those that can make themselves understood by the policemen.

I saw hilarious Italian reunions on top of the benches all around me. I saw a silent army with O. D. tickets in their caps being marched off two by two to the elevated for the Old Dominion Line, probably to wind up in labor camps, mines or foundries in the interior.

I saw several cabmen and several importunate hotel and boarding house runners accost groups of immigrants and sometimes move off with them. The immigrant from a southern European town is likely to regard a hack as a far more natural and less formidable means of conveyance than a thundering subway. He does not know the American hackman's scale of prices.

When the guides had mustered all our men we proceeded to the office on Broad street in order to divide the men into groups according to the sections of the city, and start out the separate groups with their guides. This is done with amazing quickness, as it needs to be, for the immigrant, realizing that he has landed, is in no mood for further delays. All the groups when divided went to the elevated station. Several groups bound for uptown sections seemed especially cheerful, and one could easily imagine happy receptions in the homes of their friends. But I have seen these before; to-day I hesitated between a group composed mostly of Greeks who were to be delivered to restaurants, where they would probably begin life again as dishwashers, and a curiously solemn and heterogeneous group of whom all were Russians, but between whom there was no other bond. All of these belonged in the lower East Side. Only two had the addresses of friends; the others were to be delivered to the immigrant "banks" or general rendezvous and clubhouses of the city's immigrant communities. Our group set out with two guides, for the immigrants must not be left alone even for a moment, and while one guide makes a delivery the other waits with the rest at the elevated station or in the street.

In the early days of the Immigrant Guide and Transfer it was found that runners often lay in wait for the immigrants even after they had set out with the guides, and that is why brawn and courage as well as intelligence and kindliness and a knowledge of languages must be the qualifications of an Immigrant Guide and Transfer guide. One is struck with the interest they show in the work. If there are some slack days when no ships come in, and when the guides are reduced to playing checkers in the office, there are others when their labor continues late into the night. One plump little Russian guide tells of falling asleep on a subway bench where he had dropped to wait for his train after his last delivery, and of waking in the early hours of the morning to find all the buttons clipped from his coat, a wreath of flowers substituted for his official cap and confetti everywhere—the attentions of some roistering wedding party.

The first two of our group we left safely in a bank. Their friends were not there, but the bland clerk announced that our two were expected. We left them, two lank brothers in square black astrakhan caps, sitting on the bench watching their sophisticated countrymen getting their mail and exchanging the day's gossip. Our next stop was at the basement of a synagogue where a friend of one of our men was presumably to be found. A rather supercilious little official in a black suit and a pointed black beard, eying us somewhat suspiciously, admitted that the man we asked for was there and going inside and closing the door called him from regions unknown. He came out slowly, a man of about thirty, shook his countryman's hand in a slack and thoroughly contained fashion and I felt a great wave of pity for the little man we were leaving, though his own eyes had shown no expectation of any kind. But the Russian peasant's emotions go by their own law. After the friend had signed the receipt which the guide must take back to the office the friend developed a sudden vivacity, slapped the guide on the shoulder and told him he was a good fellow, a very good fellow, for bringing his friend to him safely. And as I turned to go I saw that the eyes of the little newcomer were full of tears and caught in his hoarse little laugh a curious high note of excitement.

When we got back to the street where we had left the other guide with the rest of our party I wondered for a moment what had happened. The narrow East Side pavement was crowded far out into the street. The guides took it as a matter of course; it was simply an East Side demonstration to the most recent arrivals. Even as we walked along a good deal of rallying followed us, provoked chiefly by the coat of the most elderly of our party, a plump little man in a flat round Russian cap. The coat was of sheepskin with the wool inside, extending just below the top of his high rubber boots and embroidered down the front in several colors. Every pushcart vender along the way gave a spontaneous shout as he passed, good natured enough in the main, but plainly disturbing to the coat's owner. When we came to Delancey street he looked up and said "Delancey street" in English with unmistakable pride. It came out finally that our man had once lived in New York and was simply returning. He began to show a tendency to lag behind, as if to renounce us and our too un-American looking party. "He got us to see him home because he's probably kind of dazed by landing and not sure of himself," said the guide; "they often do that, and besides I don't think that this one wants to stand for that coat of his alone." We left him at a tenement house near his familiar Delancey street.

For our next man we could do nothing. There was no person of the name he had known at the address that accompanied it, and after some searching in the neighborhood he was taken to the Russian Home, which would make further effort to find his friend, or, failing that, show him where to try for work.

Then we brought up at our last bank with one man to deliver there, and one to deliver to a private address further on. I had been especially interested in this last and glad that he was, apparently, going to friends. He had an unusually heavy load, a bundle done up in a kind of sheet, and also a dirty sack that seemed to contain something of the consistence of flour and the weight of gunpowder! I suspect it was his favorite cereal, but it certainly looked heavy. I sat in the window seat in the bank while the guide, making his way to the desk at the rear, negotiated at some length over the delivery of the other man about whose case there seemed to be complications. In the smoke filled room there was hardly standing space. They were a generally capable looking lot of men, just through with the day's work, collecting mail and gossip, and more interested than all of them were willing to show in these recently arrived countrymen. Right beside me one man standing at the high desk that extended along the side of the room was reading, dead to the world, a one page letter in Russian. We were there fifteen minutes—he was reading it when we entered and when we left.

Meanwhile our last charge, having deposited his bundle on the floor, was standing in front of me in an agony of thought. The sweat that poured from his forehead was plainly not only the result of carrying the bundles for these many blocks. When the guide finally returned to the front of the bank and we made ready to start the little man put his hand on the guide's arm and began to expostulate vigorously, evidently waving away contemptuously some proposition, if one could judge by his face and his violent gestures. The guide explained to me finally that our little friend had changed his mind; he did not want to go to the address he had given the guide—no—no—by no means. More violent gestures from the Russian himself at this point.

With the aid of a bank official and various men from the surrounding group, now frankly interested, we finally made out that the curious word "Ker-r-omy" he kept repeating was meant for a tiny town in New Jersey, where there was a farm colony in which, he declared, he knew some one. He was taken back to the Immigrant Guide and Transfer office and the guide told me that he would probably take him to the station for the New Jersey town that night.

He lifted his bundle again, squared his little shoulders and set stanchly off with the guide. I doubt if he really knew a soul in the unpronounceable little Jersey place. He had probably heard remotely that some of his countrymen worked there. Emerson says something somewhere about "advancing on chaos and the dark." So to me he seemed to be doing. But as I followed his retreating figure the square little back did not look like that of a merely deluded drifting creature. Behind that rather stolid and grim face there may—there must—have been a vision. Though it did not appear in those inscrutable eyes it must nevertheless have been there, illuminating every step of his progress toward it. Whatever were his handicaps and those of his fellows I saw that day they did not include a lack of spirit and grim courage.

These had their tickets promptly marked O. K.

OTHER SIDE OF POLITICS

By FRED C. KELLY.

Senator Newlands does a great deal of travelling in the course of a year and he is as erratic a traveller as one would find in a long search of Pullman coaches. In the first place he will not start for a train until he has barely time to reach the station just as the train is pulling out, provided he hurries all the way. Yet he rarely misses a train and he would rather catch one on the wing than sit idly about a station ahead of time. Newlands's family has great difficulty keeping track of his movements when he is travelling. He will start from his home fully intending to go somewhere on, let us say, the Baltimore and Ohio, but if it is physically possible he is just as likely as not to change his mind on the way to the station and take the Erie. Even his destination is always subject to quick change without notice. He will start for Denver, for example, but there is no assurance that he may not skip Denver entirely and go to Texas. One of the main reasons for Newlands's sudden changes of itinerary is his grandchildren. The minute he gets on a train he wishes he were going to see his grandchildren, and the more he wishes that the more likely he is to shift his plans and go to have a visit with his grandchildren, no matter where they may be.

One day recently Newlands left his office and told one of his clerks he was going over to Philadelphia for a day or two. The next day they heard of him he was in southern California—mingling with those same grandchildren already referred to. He changed his mind after getting on the train for Philadelphia.

Here is the way Secretary Bryan made a pretty speech the other day to his wife. In rummaging through an old trunk he found a watch chain made of Mrs. Bryan's hair when she was a young girl. She had given it to him when they became engaged.

"Too bad it isn't made of gray hair," said Bryan, smiling at her; "gray hair is much more beautiful."

Former Representative Harry Covington of Maryland, now on the Supreme Court bench of the District of Columbia, tells of a cute little prank the Democrats over his way once played on the Republicans. It was in the days when the head of Abraham Lincoln was the Republican party emblem on ballot sheets. The colored people in Covington's locality held the balance of power and the Republicans diligently instilled into them the thought that they must make their mark right under Abe Lincoln's nose, for Abe was looking toward the western edge of the sheet.

One day the Democrats bribed the printer who was preparing the ballots to reverse the position of Abe Lincoln at the head of the Republican column. The printer did this, and the ballots came off the presses with Abe staring toward the right hand edge of the sheet and his nose in close proximity to the column of Democratic names. Democrats took up the Republican cry of "Vote under Abe's nose," and the Republicans were up against a ticklish situation. They knew that it would be difficult to tell the colored people to vote anywhere other than under Abe's nose without arousing suspicion. The man to tell them would have to be a man of standing in the community whose word had never been questioned. They hit on a man of the name of Johnson, a Quaker, who had been touted thereabout for years as one of the few men since George Washington who had never told a lie. He went among the colored voters and told them how the wicked Democrats had played an iniquitous trick by turning Abe's picture around. To make it still plainer to them, he showed an old and a new ballot and indicated with his finger just where they should vote in order to block the diabolical scheme of the unrighteous Democrats.

The colored people looked at the truth telling Quaker sadly and exclaimed one to another: "Marse Johnson done sol' out to the Democrats," and went right ahead voting under Abe's nose.

One of the best political speeches ever delivered by Senator Swanson of Virginia was to an audience of two women. He had been campaigning in a moonshining district off in the mountains and was entertained over night at the home of a well to do native of the region.

After dinner that evening the host said: "See hyah, my wife and daughter haven't eveh had the pleasuh of hyain' yo' style of speakin'. I want you to stand up right hyah and now and give them that same speech you delivuhed this afte'noon."

Senator Swanson was game. He did not omit a gesture or an anecdote from the speech and the audience seemed in accord with what he had to say. Also, the women must have made favorable comments on the speech to the neighbors, for he has been carrying that precinct by almost unanimous vote ever since.